Practical Reasoning about Final Ends

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Introduction

Despite its broad practical importance, the question whether we can reason practically about final ends may strike an archaic note. To show that relegating this question to the ersatz battleground of discarded philosophies would be a mistake, I begin by explaining my topic and its significance (§1). I then describe how some rather diffuse philosophical stances – ones that ultimately should be discarded – have made deliberating about ends seem impossible (§2). The reader will then request, and be granted, a preview of my argument as a whole and an indication of those more particular opponents against whom I will be arguing (§3). To explain the topic, I begin with an example.

§1. THE ISSUE

Having children is not for everyone a matter of deliberation. I do not simply mean that it can be the result of mistake or coercion. Far more commonly, it is blandly accepted as a natural, if not automatic, concomitant of marriage. What could be more traditional? Yet for some couples propagation is a matter of deliberate choice. Moral issues may impinge on this choice. An educated professional in an industrialized country, sufficiently worried that population growth will cause more pollution than the world can absorb, may refrain from having more than one child. The injustice and cruelty of the world may so disgust an impoverished citizen of a developing country that she refuses to bring a child into it. For others considering parenthood, the salient issues may be more personal. They may ask themselves whether they are ready to give up the spontaneity and thrill of footloose adventure so as to buckle down and support a family, be an example to children, and avoid orphaning them at an early age. Are they ready for the lifelong responsibility to another person, so less revocable than marriage? The peasant may worry about whether having another pair of hands in the fields will sufficiently offset having another

mouth to feed, and whether the authorities will fine the family for having more than its quota of children. Such are the questions that are apt to occur to someone, doubting the wisdom of well-worn ways, who begins to deliberate about whether to have a child.

All of these questions, including both those with moral overtones as well as those without, are practical questions, questions about what to do. There is no uniquely canonical way to phrase a practical question. It is often natural to say that one is deciding what one "should do," or wondering what one "ought to do," where this "should" and this "ought" are not anchored in any particular set of norms – moral, religious, social, or prudential – but rather stand *sans phrase*. Asking what is "to be done" similarly expresses openness to whatever reasons may seem relevant. We will also see that the general practical "ought" of these questions does not carry with it the presumption of complete and univocal advice sought when one asks, "What is the right thing to do in these circumstances?" A fleeting circumstance may occasion any of these sorts of practical questions, or they may take in concern with how one is to live a whole life. I may ask, for instance, what I am to do to mold my character to prepare for the likely frailty and dependence of old age. To be sure, some limits to deliberative questions – limitations we will be exploring in depth in Chapter III – center on the fact that deliberation starts from a practical question. As Aristotle noted, deliberation concerns "things that are in our power and can be done."[1] We do not deliberate about things past or about future events that we are sure are beyond our power to affect. "Practical deliberation" I take to be a redundant phrase.

That all deliberation is practical in the sense that it is concerned with what to do should not obscure the fact that we can deliberate in theoretical contexts. For instance, the scientist can deliberate about which strategy of experimentation to follow or which theory to bank his or her career upon. This deliberation can involve ends important to any scientific endeavor – ends, in brief, such as explanation, understanding, and knowledge. While conceptually it is one thing to decide what to do and another to decide what is true, in the practice of science these two activities merge.

Deliberation – thinking about what to do – can be a bad idea. Dangerous or fast-moving situations often call for rapid, resolute action and make hesitation a losing strategy. There are also less strategic and more substantive reasons not to deliberate in certain circumstances. Critical re-

1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *N.E.*) 1112a29. Unless noted, all quotations from Aristotle will be from the revised Oxford translation (Aristotle 1984).

flection of the sort involved in deliberation can wither the fragile goodness of traditional or intimate practices, often crushed by self-consciousness (cf. Williams 1985, 148, 167–9). This incompatibility between certain goods and self-consciousness about them – whether in skills such as painting where it can lead to confusion or in sexual or ritual practices where it can lead to embarrassment – does not indict them as irrational. They might even be goods that a fully rational agent – whatever she is like – *would* endorse on ideally informed reflection. It's just that in any actual attempt to endorse them deliberately while engaging in them she trips over her own feet. In addition, it may be morally wrong to deliberate in certain cases. An excessively deliberative approach may involve "one thought too many." Williams influentially developed this sort of attack on impartial morality, with reference to the case of a person in a lifeboat who must choose between saving his or her spouse and saving a stranger (Williams 1981b, 16). A virtuous and loving spouse, Williams suggested, should straightaway prefer the spouse without stopping to reflect about whether favoring one's spouse is morally permitted.[2] Sometimes, deliberation is not appropriate. Returning to the issue of having children, we find a very different sort of moral limit on deliberation exemplified by those Catholic moralists who hold that since conception is by the grace of God, it is wrong to deliberate about whether or not to have children. Some present this as a special instance of the argument from the fragility of particular goods, here that of the union of man and wife in full openness to God's grace. Both contraception and active measures to increase fertility can be cast as attempts whose self-consciousness and aspiration to control interfere with this overriding good. For those who take this position, deliberating about whether to have children could properly take place only within the broader context of deciding whether to get married.

While deliberation is thus not always called for or even permissible, it is often necessary and apt. When it rightly occurs, it had better proceed rationally. Indeed, whether or not it is appropriate for the agent to deliberate in a given situation may depend upon whether he or she will be able to deliberate rationally. Because extreme fear can cloud judgment, deliberating in dangerous situations can be dangerous. You may have time to think up some tricky maneuver when the mugger asks for your wallet;

2 Naturally, many upholders of impartial morality leaped to answer this charge, some arguing that they do not hold morality to require the spouse to pause to deliberate (e.g., Herman 1984). My present purpose is not to enter into this controversy but just to note that both sides seem to accept the view that requiring deliberation of a certain kind would be an intrusion upon the integrity of the agent.

but if fear (and adrenaline) will addle your thinking, causing you to light on some such hare-brained response as trying to run, you would do best to train yourself to hand over your wallet automatically to any mugger who points a pistol your way. Setting out in general when deliberation is appropriate is not a sane task. It is a tricky and a substantively loaded matter. The presence of strong emotion, by itself, does not make deliberation dangerous; indeed, as I will be arguing in §27, even strong emotions such as fear can sometimes fruitfully focus deliberation. There will be no simple, hard-and-fast rules here. Whether deliberation in a given context offers the prospect of rationality, however, seems important to whether it is there appropriate.

This fact gives my topic, the possibility of deliberating rationally about ends or purposes, practical significance. For reasons that I will canvass briefly in the next section, many today seem convinced that we cannot deliberate rationally about ends. Perhaps only implicitly, via the sort of reasoning I have just laid out, they take this limitation to excuse them for not attempting to deliberate about ends. If the thesis of this book is correct, this unfortunately limits their lives. We can deliberate rationally about ends. Often, we must do so in order to reach a rationally defensible decision. To assume in a blanket fashion that rational deliberation cannot extend to adopting ends is wrongly to suppose that intellectual effort cannot be fruitfully brought to bear upon what matters to us most.

Thus, to return to our example, having children might well be conceived as an end – that is, as something for the sake of which actions are done.[3] It would even be reasonable to think of it as a final end – that is, as something for the sake of which an action is done or is to be done and for which the action would still be done even if no other advantage flowed from it. Having children might be considered intrinsically worthwhile, wholly apart from whether or not one's children will support one in one's old age or contribute to the establishment of world peace. To understand having children in this way is to place it within a complex practice – and not, say, as reduced to bodily acts of childbearing and feeding – whose goods can only be fully understood from within the concrete social traditions in terms of which it goes on (cf. MacIntyre 1984, 193–4). Rituals of baptism or redemption, balloons or chocolate cigars; reciprocal patterns of mutual kvetching about lack of sleep; and intricate stroller

3 The terminology set out in this paragraph, with its broad sense of "end," within the range of which "final end" is distinguished, is adapted (as I see it) from Aristotle: see Richardson 1992a. It will be developed more fully in §7.

dances for discreetly displaying parental pride are all examples of what may go into constituting what "having children" will mean in a given social context.

Yet this complexity, which stems from the way ends are embedded in layers of social practice affecting their interpretation and significance, also threatens to divert our attention from the ends themselves. Pursuing any one end yields many different goods and bads. This being so, someone who is convinced that we cannot deliberate rationally about ends will indeed truncate deliberation about whether or not to have children; but he need not simply say that this is a matter on which, the intellect being silent, gut feelings must decide. There remain various time-honored patterns of deliberation that assume the ends as given and nondeliberable, but that nonetheless attempt to cope with the ways they conflict when the pursuit of one good brings bads in its train or involves forsaking other goods. One method that may seem appropriate to the decision whether or not to have children is that of pros and cons. Benjamin Franklin summed up this form of "Moral Algebra" in a letter to Joseph Priestley (quoted in Bain 1865, 424–5):

> In the affair of so much importance to you, wherein you ask my advice, I cannot, for want of sufficient premises, counsel you *what* to determine; but, if you please, I will tell you *how*. When those difficult cases occur, they are difficult, chiefly because, while we have them under consideration, all the reasons *pro* and *con* are not present to the mind at the same time; but sometimes one set present themselves, and at other times another, the first being out of sight. Hence the various purposes or inclinations that alternately prevail, and the uncertainty that perplexes us.
>
> To get over this, my way is, to divide half a sheet of paper by a line into two columns; writing over the one *pro* and over the other *con*; then, during three or four days' consideration, I put down, under the different heads, short hints of the different motives, that at different times occur to me, *for* or *against* the measure. When I have thus got them altogether in one view, I endeavor to estimate their respective weights; and when I find two (one on each side) that seem equal, I strike them both out. If I find a reason *pro* equal to some *two* reasons *con*, I strike out the *three*. If I judge some two reasons *con* equal to some *three* reasons *pro*, I strike out the *five*; and thus proceeding, I find where the balance lies. . . . And though the weight of reasons cannot be taken with the precision of algebraic quantities, yet, when each is thus considered separately and comparatively, and the whole lies before me, I think I can judge better, and am less liable to take a false step; and, in fact, I have found great advantage from this kind of equation, in what may be termed *moral* or *prudential algebra*.

Franklin's remarkable confidence in his ability to weigh heterogeneous reasons against each other here shows up in his silence about any restric-

tions on the compared reasons that must be met for them to cancel one another out. Whether this hearty confidence in simple weighing amounts to much is a question I will address in Chapter V. If anything really can be weighed against anything else, then final ends, too, can be weighed.

For the slightly more modest weigher, who wants to think of reasons as being similar before crossing them out as offsetting, such a prudential algebra will encourage seeing activities as means to further ends rather than as themselves choiceworthy for their own sake. By this restricted version of the method, a simplified course of deliberation about whether to have children might go as follows: Children bring joy, but then again so does work, which competes with children for time commitment; hence, the two cancel each other out in joy. On income, by contrast, children are a net drain whereas work is the main source. Clearly, best not to have children! Here we want to respond that this deliberator has doubly missed the point. In coming to doubt whether it is best for him or her to have children (to use yet another locution for a general practical question), he or she has thrown into suspense a central aspect of his or her system of ends. To attempt then to respond to this situation by employing a prudential algebra that treats ends as fixed and has no place for their interpretation is to fail to take one's own questioning seriously. Someone wondering whether to have children should not presume that the qualities of joy that they bring can be offset in any simple way even by the joys of hard work well rewarded. Yet meditating on these qualitative differences moves in the opposite direction from collecting reasons under pro or con headings on a short list. Worse, Franklin's method does not invite the deliberator to ask whether having children is worth pursuing for its own sake. It encourages reducing all considerations to the same level, as commensurable pros and cons, ordered only in terms of "weight" and not in terms of what is to be sought for the sake of what. Nussbaum (1991) eloquently discusses the human costs of this sort of attitude. And in any case, taking the net effect on disposable income to settle this decision sidesteps the central issue and affronts the goods involved. Income is typically not a final end, but a means to other things – often, to supporting children. This deliberator should be trying to decide whether income will have that importance for them, or some other. If this deliberator treats the option of having children as itself merely a means to achieving other goods of the sort that might be listed in the column of pros, then perhaps he or she is in fact not ready for parenthood.

The more rigorous models of deliberation now standard in welfare economics and decision theory make explicit the setting aside of delib-

eration about ends that Franklin's algebra merely suggests. These modern approaches, which I will criticize in some detail in §15, assume as given a set of preferences or a "space" of goods. Given these, they can spin out sophisticated theorems expressing the requirements for coming up with, say, a complete ordering of one's preferences or for coping rationally with risk distributed across different dimensions of value. The case of whether to have children already suggests, however, that these wonderfully precise models cover only the less important part of deliberation. About what matters most – settling upon ends – they are largely silent. Sometimes they go beyond silence, explicitly ruling out the possibility of rational deliberation of ends, as in the following statement by one of the most famous theorists of this school, Maurice Allais (1979 [1953], 70):

> It cannot be too strongly emphasized *that there are no criteria for the rationality of ends as such other than the condition of consistency.* Ends are completely arbitrary. To prefer highly dispersed random outcomes may seem irrational to the prudent, but for somebody with this penchant, there is nothing irrational about it. This area is like that of tastes: they are what they are, and differ from one person to the next.

Yet many of their proponents tout these formal decision theories as "complete" accounts of practical reasoning, whose sometimes counterintuitive results must be accepted as the price of supreme theoretical unity. It is as if a fully consistent and effectively functioning word processing software program were accepted as delineating a complete theory of writing, despite its silence about what to write; or again, as if an atlas were accepted as giving a complete theory of travel, despite its silence about where to go.

Yes, such silence can be hard to avoid. Trying to explain why one pursues what one does take to be worth pursuing for its own sake ties the tongues of the most articulate. This is after all not accidental: It is part of the role of final ends to answer questions about why to do things. If they themselves are thrown into question, what can we say? I find myself in this predicament when called upon to explain why I love philosophy. On the one hand, pointing to what the activity of philosophy yields – such as intellectual excitement, clarity, continuing the evolution of a certain culture, and perhaps even remotely contributing to the public good – unsettles the claim that I value it for its own sake, apart from any other goods in which it results. On the other hand, picking out certain constituents of the activity of philosophy as I understand it – such as pursuing general questions about reason and the good – seems only to postpone the question why. For simply to describe the activity of philosophy more

finely is not to answer a question about why it is to be pursued for its own sake.

Yet we do sometimes criticize intrinsic desires as irrational. In some of these cases, we do so on the grounds that desires involve a distinction that seems arbitrary, and for which we can imagine no adequate rationale (cf. Parfit 1984, 124). For example, consider Jack, who seeks out and values opportunities for medical research with anyone not named Henry. We can suppose something explains this quirk of Jack's, namely that a Henry in his second-grade class did something nasty to him, but that the residue of this past injury is neither so powerful that it would ruin Jack's enjoyment were he actually to do research with someone named Henry nor so prominent in his mind that he would cite this as his reason for not wanting a Henry as collaborator. If he were to work with a Henry, he would enjoy it and the quirk would disappear (cf. Millgram, forthcoming). Jack realizes that this may well be true: He simply doesn't want to work with a Henry. He has no other reason to avoid working with Henrys. Now, if the only researcher in the area who could work productively with Jack on the problems preoccupying him is named Henry, and Jack forgoes this opportunity, I think we will agree that he is being irrational in pursuing for its own sake only research work with other-named partners. He has no reason – or no good reason – to superimpose this arbitrary distinction within the category of goods that his research aims mark out. (This is what, in the jurisprudence of the United States Constitution, counts as "irrationality" under the Equal Protection Clause. A statute fails the standard of rationality if it imposes a distinction among citizens that has no realistically conceivable rationale.)[4]

Notice, to anticipate a theme that will be developed in Chapter VI, that this judgment of irrationality hinges on this agent having nothing to say about why all Henrys are special. His ability to give a discursive explanation gives out at that point. A theory of rational deliberation of ends must show that discursive rationality does not give out every time one reaches a final end. Consider the person who is indifferent to all but philosophical wisdom. She will knowingly forgo any amount of scientific or historical wisdom rather than give up even the smallest bit of philosophical insight. It is not that she believes that history or science are worthless inquiries. She does not believe the old story that philosophy is the

4 *F. S. Royster Guano Co.* v. *Virginia*, 253 U.S. 412, 415 [1920]. Compare also the "principle of individuation by justifiers" offered in Broome 1991, 103, discussed further in §15: "Outcomes should be distinguished as different if and only if they differ in a way that makes it rational to have a preference between them."

queen of the sciences. She simply values philosophical wisdom, and not the other forms of wisdom, for its own sake. And here we are tempted to say that this is just an aspect of human valuing, that the question why can be pursued only until one reaches a final end, valued for its own sake. Against this conclusion that reasoning runs out at final ends, however, I will be arguing (in §7) that it typically relies upon an overly simple understanding of what a final end is, and (in subsequent chapters) that the fact that final ends provide answers to what is sought for its own sake does not mean that rational deliberation cannot extend to adopting them. In any case, it would be rash to throw out as irrational the indifference to nonphilosophical wisdom just because it makes a distinction within a broader value category. The contrast between this case and Jack's highlights the substantive judgment involved in declaring a refusal to collaborate with a Henry irrational: Simply picking out Henrys as special is not a *good* reason. Picking out philosophy as special may be.

We also criticize the positive value categories that agents pick out – as opposed to distinctions within broader value categories – as being irrational. A well-known example is Rawls's grass-blade counter (Rawls 1971, 432–3). This imaginary person is one

> whose only pleasure is to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas such as park squares and well-trimmed lawns. He is otherwise intelligent and actually possesses unusual skills, since he manages to survive by solving difficult mathematical problems for a fee. . . . Naturally we would be surprised that such a person should exist. Faced with his case, we would try out other hypotheses. Perhaps he is peculiarly neurotic and in early life acquired an aversion to human fellowship. . . . But if we allow that his nature is to enjoy this activity and not to enjoy any other, and that there is no feasible way to alter his condition, then surely a rational plan for him will center around this activity.

That is, if we were to define the rationality of a life plan as taking all of an agent's intrinsic desires for granted, then this way of life may count as rational for him. Yet the example also tends to show that our judgments of rationality are not limited by this sort of assumption. If we are forced by a definition to grant the life plan rational, then we may still count the individual as irrational. Whether we do will depend importantly on how his ends are described. A grass-blade counter who recognizes his neurosis sufficiently to be able to say to himself that he must count to be happy (or to avoid depression) seems considerably more rational than one who simply says that he counts blades for its own sake. Perhaps the latter counter is beyond reasoning with; but if not, we will consider that there are rational grounds for getting him to change his mind about what he

pursues for its own sake. It is not rational to take counting blades of grass as a final end.

Here, again, my point is just that we sometimes criticize intrinsic desires as irrational. I am not yet trying to set out the basis on which we do so. This may be quite narrow. We might, for instance, recognize a distinction between the grass-blade counter and the (actual) person who has collected 4,300 four-leaf clovers. What admirable persistence and luck we might see in the latter, what neurotic compulsion in the former! The distinction, here, slices finely (compare that noted by Parfit 1984, 123, between a good whim and a bad whim). Our judgments of the irrationality of intrinsic desires are freighted with substantive presuppositions; but that is just to be expected. Substantive rationality, which judges the rationality of someone's intrinsic commitments, must carry substantive baggage. Yet judgments of substantive irrationality are part of what a theory of rational deliberation should enable us to explain.

There is one more layer of potential irrationality. People sometimes inappropriately connect an activity with an end for the sake of which it is pursued. For example, suppose that we do decide that it is perfectly rational to value the collection of four-leaf clovers for its own sake. Even so, this does not mean that we would recognize it as rational to choose to have children solely in order to use their good eyesight, small hands, and free labor to speed up one's collection of four-leaf clovers. This is a bad reason to choose to have children. Its irrationality seems to consist in improperly ordering activities as means to ends. While the objection, here, may be partly a moral one, against using children as mere means, it is not entirely that. We would not equally object to the farmer who decided to have children in order to have additional hands to help with the harvest. Unlike having children to further a hobby of collecting four-leaf clovers, this is not crazy. We have the sense that having children ranks higher and stands more centrally in human activity than collecting good-luck charms (though not necessarily more centrally than keeping food on the table), and that, if anything, such hobbies should be regulated by reference to procreation (say, as a superstitious way of enhancing luck with fertility) but not the other way around. Again, I am intending here not to defend this sort of assumption, but simply to point out that this kind of ordering of final ends represents an additional basis on which we sometimes criticize as irrational someone's conception of what is intrinsically valuable.

This brief survey of ways in which we criticize the deliberations of others suggests that we at least implicitly believe that we can deliberate rationally about ends. To hold the explicit position that we cannot is to

withdraw from criticizing agents in these ways. Despite the commonsense evidence that we can and do deliberate rationally about ends, however, a number of highly influential philosophical doctrines have narrowed our recognition (at least in the modern West) of the extent of practical reason. One of these philosophical obstacles to allowing for rational deliberation of ends has already been alluded to, for it builds upon the fact that final ends seem to be answers to the question why something is to be pursued, and hence not themselves subject to this questioning. This and the other important obstacles will be canvassed in the next section.

§2. OBSTACLES

Understanding the motivation of this book's argument requires being aware of the philosophical obstacles to recognizing that we deliberate rationally about ends. Obstacles to this recognition are not the same as opponents of my thesis. I see my overall tasks as first clearing away philosophical obstacles to allowing that we can set new final ends rationally and then constructing a positive account about how we can do so. As I will explain in the next section, in setting out my strategy of argument, more direct philosophical opponents will be encountered as I undertake these two tasks, negative and positive. Here I will simply sketch the main obstacles in preliminary fashion, leaving a more exact statement of the difficulties to the chapters that deal with them. As will be apparent, these are barriers to recognizing even a form of relative rationality (§4) – rationality relative to an individual's starting points, as end–means rationality is – in deliberation pertaining to ends. The principal obstacles are three: resistance to the idea that ends are subject to deliberation at all, insistence that rational deliberation must presume ends as criteria of decision rather than subjecting them to revision, and last-ditch conviction that an ultimate end, at least, lies by its very nature beyond the reach of practical reasoning to vary or adopt. I will call these the obstacles of scope, system, and source.

The first obstacle, the belief that practical questions about ends overstep the scope of deliberation altogether, let alone that of rational deliberation, in turn has a double origin in the Western philosophical tradition. It can arise from a contrast between description and prescription or as an analytic claim about the nature of deliberation.

The classic tag for these first two rationales for the first obstacle is Hume's dictum that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (Hume 1986, II:iii:3, p. 415). Whether the view was Hume's need

not concern us, and has been argued both ways by interpreters.[5] I will call the view "pseudo-Humean." The core of the pseudo-Humean position is the claim that while reason is concerned with ascertaining the truth of statements or beliefs, desires are not such as to be true or false. Although reason can get a grip on factual and logical questions, it cannot, on this view, settle purely prescriptive ones. For this reason, Hume wrote, " 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" (Hume 1986, II:iii:3, p. 416). This bit of Hume, at least, tends to indicate that he would allow for no rational criticism of Jack's aversion to Henrys, counting blades of grass, or having children so that they can help collect clovers. The negative lesson of the alignment of ends with intrinsic desires on the prescriptive side of things is bolstered, on the pseudo-Humean account, by a motivational point. The passions, while not true or false, are nonetheless depicted as the masters of reason. The passions provide motivation and direction; reason's task is to do their bidding. The passions get instrumental reasoning – reasoning from end to means – going.

That deliberation must always begin from some end, if understood distributively, that is, as holding strictly of each episode of deliberation, may be thought to provide a third reason why deliberation's scope cannot include setting or revising final ends. As I have noted, this limitation may be regarded as an analytic truth about deliberation. Deliberation, it might be held, is essentially the selection of means to some end. Here, the best-known classical tag for the view is Aristotle's statement that "we deliberate not about ends but about what contributes to ends" (*N.E.* 1112b11–12). As in the case of Hume, it is debated whether Aristotle really intended this claim to rule out deliberation about ends of the sort I defend.[6] In any case, as this recent translation acknowledges, deliberation may include ascertaining the constituent components of some end as well as assessing alternative causal means to it. Either way, however, deliberation must begin from some end. This fact tempts us, therefore, to see that end as setting the bounds on the deliberation to which it gives rise.

For these three kinds of reason, then, many doubt that deliberation can extend to ends. Since ends are seen as essentially prescriptive, they are not

5 For a postrevisionist interpretation according to which Hume really does, after all, take the strong instrumentalist position I am calling "pseudo-Humean," see Piper 1988–9. I do not find Piper's textual case wholly compelling.

6 For my sketch of how Aristotelian practical reasoning can settle on new final ends, see Richardson 1988. Tuozzo 1991, however, may be right that this reasoning cannot come under the rubric of Aristotle's *bouleusis*, traditionally translated "deliberation."

subject to the constraint of fitting with the facts. Since our ends (as expressed in intrinsic desires) are what motivate us, they set the limits on practical reasoning rather than being subject to limits themselves. And since deliberation naturally reflects these inherent metaphysical (or epistemological) and psychological facts, it is incoherent to speak of deliberating about whether a given item is a final end. Final ends fall outside deliberation's scope.

But wait: What happens when ends conflict? Here the latter-day pseudo-Humean may initially seem more accepting of deliberation about ends than is Hume, for contemporary economics and decision theory squarely face the pervasive contingent conflicts among ends and desires. Here some further scope for the criticism of desires emerges; however, there simultaneously arises a second obstacle to deliberation about ends, one which focuses on the sort of rational system required in order to resolve practical conflicts rationally.

This second obstacle, that of system, can be explained more simply than the first. It revolves around the idea that commensurability is a prerequisite of rational choice, an idea that underlies the appeal of the maximizing formulas of contemporary utilitarianism and rational choice theory. Things would work out very simply indeed if there were at bottom but one kind of intrinsic value – pleasure, say – in terms of which all value could be measured together, or commensurated. Then rational choice would concern itself with maximizing that "commensurans," as I will call the commensurating value or good. The existence of serious practical conflicts tends to undercut the plausibility of such a simple value monism. Still, it may seem that resolving such conflicts rationally depends upon weighing the conflicting values on a single scale and choosing that option which yields the best score thereon. In deciding whether to have children, for instance, one may feel torn between being entirely devoted to one's work and experiencing the intimate love of parenthood. This choice might be made rationally if, for example, each of these values could be adequately assessed as a contribution to one's happiness; for then one could decide whether or not to have children in terms of which option would lead to greater happiness. Since this approach depends upon treating the commensurating end – here, happiness – as the one final end relevant for this choice, the idea that commensurability is a prerequisite of rational choice seems to rule out rational deliberation of ends. Practical rationality, on this account, depends upon holding some end fixed for each choice so as to commensurate the values that compete in that choice. Practical rationality thereby resists any thoroughgoing deliberation of ends.

Still, this insistence on commensurability obviously leaves room for a considerable amount of systematization. It may take deliberative work, or at least practical reasoning of some kind, in order to arrive at a clear view of the commensurating end(s). This will be especially true if there is just one commensurans – pleasure, happiness, utility, or what have you – in terms of which all competing values are to be weighed. Some deliberation about subordinate ends therefore seems compatible with this picture. Deliberation about the single ultimate end that serves to commensurate all subordinate considerations, however, has no place on this picture. This observation brings us to the threshold of the third obstacle.

The third obstacle to recognizing rational deliberation of ends, the source obstacle, concerns the notion of an ultimate end and its place in deliberation. While there might be ways in which we might deliberate rationally about subordinate ends, we must always lean, it might be thought, on some more final end that is held fixed. Ends provide the framework within which we deliberate. Without some end held fixed, deliberation will lack a target. These reflections lead to the conclusion that an ultimate end is an end from which no episode of deliberation can abstract. An ultimate end, it is suggested, is the source of rational valuation: It is the ultimately fixed background against which all deliberation necessarily proceeds insofar as it is rational. The last proviso is important, for it indicates how an ultimate end can be viewed as the necessary aim of rational deliberation and yet have substantive content, for those acting irrationally may fail to pursue it.[7] Echoing the gerundives of Aristotle and of Aquinas, this view holds that the ultimate end is to be pursued by the rational agent. It is the nature of the ultimate end, on this view, to be the necessary touchstone of rational choice. It is perhaps even the source of value also in a more literal sense, giving rise to all of the value in subordinate ends and pursuits. Be that as it may, the ultimate end itself, on this conception, clearly cannot be thrown into question by rational deliberation. Many modern thinkers who allow for some rational systematization of conflicting subordinate values or aims nonetheless deny the possibility of rational deliberation of ends on account of the source obstacle. Their resistance will not be fully overcome unless we can show that rational deliberation can extend to the level of the ultimate end.

In seeking to overcome these philosophical barriers to recognizing ra-

7 There might be certain very broad readings of "the good," "desire-satisfaction," or "happiness" that make it analytically true that all deliberate human action aims at one of them. Perhaps the interpretations of these that would make these claims come out true would make them uninteresting (cf. Stocker 1979, Velleman 1992).